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Atari Online News, Etc.
A-ONE Online Magazine
Dana P. Jacobson, Publisher/Managing Editor
Joseph Mirando, Managing Editor
Rob Mahlert, Associate Editor

Atari Online News, Etc. Staff

Dana P. Jacobson -- Editor
Joe Mirando -- "People Are Talking"
Michael Burkley -- "Unabashed Atariophile"
Albert Dayes -- "CC: Classic Chips"
Rob Mahlert -- Web site
Thomas J. Andrews -- "Keeper of the Flame"

With Contributions by:

Kevin Savetz

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->From the Editor's Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
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Yes, I'm really starting to feel the itch more and more. The weather continuing to change for the better here in New England. The days are getting longer. Spring is definitely closing in on us! It's been a long and cold wait! Now watch, I bet it snows this weekend!

Okay, it finally happened this week. I came across a few stories this week that have really got my blood boiling to the point that I have to comment. I knew that it would happen sooner or later!

An old stupid idea that has surfaced again: want to curb spam? Charge money for e-mail! Hello!!?? Forget about the fact that most of us who have access to the internet already pay for this service in our monthly fees, although I guess that you could consider e-mail as something you can currently do for free. But just think about how really stupid this is. Why would anyone think that by financially "punishing" people who send out real e-mail as well as those that send spam is going to curb spam - and is fair? You can't stop spam well now - just how do you think that you're going to collect fees from the spammers? What are going to do, sell electronic e-mail ration books; and when you run out you can't send more mail until you buy additional rations? What are these people thinking? If you really want to stop spam, put the effort into the technology to rid the world of this crap. It would be worthy of a Nobel prize!

How about this bright person? The top Bush administration's Supreme Court lawyer decided that by typing in "free porn" into an internet search engine, and getting over six million hits proves that we need a law protecting kids from online smut! Oh, you definitely proved your point to me! Not! This lawyer's 12-year old son probably downloaded a clip of Janet Jackson's "Boob-gate" episode, and got caught with it! Now don't get me wrong, there is a lot of stuff out there on the web that children shouldn't be seeing. But let's not make such an over-generalization about it based on a web search using two words. I can guarantee you that not all of those porn "hits" have nothing to do with what this lawyer is peddling.

The one really good article that I enjoyed was the one on the efforts to eliminate spyware. As a member of AOL, I was offered a couple of free programs, one of which was a spyware search utility. I had downloaded it a few weeks ago, but just never got around to installing it. Well, this week, I did. I couldn't believe the spyware and other crap that this program found in my system! And after eliminating all of this stuff, my system ran a lot more smoothly, and some weird problems that I was having were gone!

It’s amazing how some of this stuff gets into your system. If you use a PC, I would highly recommend getting some kind of anti-spyware program!

Until next time...

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Steem v3 Released

Steem version 3 is now ready for download. Lots of bugs have been fixed since the last version, and a few much wanted features have been added (especially to XSteem).

-- Emulation Bugs Fixed --
. Lots of timings improved.
. DMA chip emulation improved (Double Dragon 2, Plutos).
. Fixed FDC read address (Klax, Badlands, Chase HQ).
. Fixed blitter byte bug (Kuovadis).
. Added real FDC CRCs (thanks obo).
. Fixed VBL interrupt bug (IDEN demo, B and W Dentro).
. Added more hacks to fix IKBD reset problems (Hammerfist, Big Run).
. Fixed ACIA write timing (A Grumbler in the Rutting Season).
. Fixed blitting directly from cart (Fast BASIC).
. Fixed pc high byte bug (Adebug).
. Fixed disable drive B when changing hard drives bug.
. Capped hard drive free bytes to 64Mb (Signum/KCS Omega).
. Fixed holding down opposite joystick directions at the same time bug (Robocop II).
. Fixed RS-232 CTS bug (Cyber Assault).
. Added some IKBD delays (RipDis Demo menu, Art of Code, Imperium).
. Fixed stupid steemupdate bug (won’t take effect until next release).

-- Other Bugs Fixed --
. Fixed fullscreen directory tree popup bug.
. Fixed deactivate fullscreen in 640x400 crash.
. DEBUG: Fixed break on IRQ->Trap.

-- New Features --
. XSTEEM: Fullscreen.
. XSTEEM: PC Joysticks.
. Integrated disk manager with MSA Converter v2 (not yet released)
. Added support for pre-TOS ROM images.
. DEBUG: Proper cycle accurate tracing, including visual gun position display.
. DEBUG: FDC/DMA browser.
. DEBUG: IKBD browser.

Get the update from the swanky new Steem website.
http://www.blimey.strayduck.com/

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING
compiled by Joe Mirando
joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. Another week has come and gone, and Mother Nature is warming up to us more and more. On walking in to work the other day, I noticed a patch of asphalt that had been put down in November. Where there is now asphalt, there had once been a "poor man's garden".... Some milkweed stalks, clover, and even some violets and tulips.

Well, in the past 2 or 3 days, I've noticed little bumps popping up here and there in the new asphalt. This morning, I noticed half a dozen thick green shoots popping up through the dark black asphalt. They're tulips.

I'm constantly amazed by Mother Nature and her minions. Sure, I've seen this kind of thing before, where grass will work its way up through cracks in the pavement, or weeds will wear away at concrete, but it still amazes me. I know, I amaze easily, right? <grin>

But think about it for a moment... without the benefit of intelligence, without the strength of muscle, and even without the leverage provided by a skeletal structure, these simple plants have been able to push their way through a layer of asphalt that most humans would not be able to free themselves from.

There's a lesson there, folks. Slow and steady often wins the race.

Well, that's the only pearl of wisdom you're going to hear from me this time around. That wasn't too painful now, was it? Let's get to the news, hints, tips and info from the UseNet.

From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup
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Our own Rob Mahlert asks about a video card for a Falcon:

"I have a Nova card for my Falcon AB040. It has a clip that needs to connect to a pin on the falcon's motherboard. My question is: Does anyone know what pin to place the clip on?"

Jo Even Skarstein tells Rob:

"Somewhere with +12V. There is a capacitor between the expansion port and PSU, you can connect it to the positive end of it."

Raoul Teulings asks about GEMDOS errors:

"Can anyone help me with the following problem: when
I go to a menu in certain programs, for instance
'saving as RTF file' in Papyrus i get the message
'GEMDOS ERROR SYSTEM FAILED' and my TT freezes. Has
this got to do with MagiC or has it another cause.

I hope that someone can help me because it stops
the workflow..."

Derryck Croker tells Raoul:

"I seem to remember that the blitter can cause this sort of problem? Is there a blitter on the TT?"

Lonny Pursell tells Derryck:

"Nope. Does have cpu cache toggle though."

Martin Byttebier tells Raoul:

"Which version of Papyrus?
With Papyrus 8.2 under N_AES/freeMiNT I don’t have any problem.

Papyrus 10 demo seems to have problems to save in rtf. I tried to save the liesmich.pap in rtf. I got an out of memory message and this on a 256 MB machine??? Maybe a demo restriction? I don’t know."

’Sam F’ asks about using a desktop picture under plain old TOS:

"How does one add a pic to the desktop, if one is not using a full blown desktop (Jinee, Thing, etc.)? I’d really like to add something to the desktop...it’s getting a little boring."

Sasa Andrijasevic tells Sam:

"There are many programs like deskpic, picdesk, etc...try at aniplay.atari.org "

’Zorro’ adds:

"You can add a pick to the desktop in single tos mode without using Jinnee/thing with picdesk.

It’s a multi purpose utility (resolution expander/ VDI/ fileselector/...) wrote by Didier, you can find it on aniplayer web page."

Well folks, I know it’s incredibly short, but that’s all there is for this week. Tune in again next week, same time, same station, and be ready to listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas!
""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""" Atari's Dead Man's Hand!

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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!
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Take-Two Confirms New 'Grand Theft Auto' Release

Take-Two Interactive Software Inc. on Monday said the next sequel to its blockbuster crime adventure "Grand Theft Auto" series would be released in October, an announcement that sent its shares up 5 percent.

Game publisher Take-Two on Monday said "Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas" will be in stores on Oct. 19 in North America and Oct. 22 in Europe. An October release for the game had been widely anticipated.

Take-Two shares moved higher on the news, as analysts said the announcement brought some welcome clarity to the company's game release plans.

The last two games in the franchise, "Grand Theft Auto: Vice City" and "Grand Theft Auto 3," sold a combined 22 million units worldwide, propelling Take-Two to the upper echelons of the industry.

Fans lined up for hours to buy copies of "Vice City" when it was released in October 2002. Together with "GTA 3," the two games have been at or near the top of the sales charts since late 2001.

The release of "San Andreas" is expected to be a financial boon to Take-Two, whose fiscal year ends in October.

Take-Two's shares have been under pressure of late from the impact of a U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission investigation into its accounting practices. Take-Two recently restated results going back to 1999. It also slashed its outlook on the poor sales of key games like "Max Payne 2."

As with the initial releases of "GTA 3" and "Vice City," the new "San Andreas" will be exclusive to Sony Corp.'s PlayStation 2. Take-Two has not said if a version will eventually come out for Microsoft Corp.'s Xbox, as happened with the last two games.

"Although management has already provided news that this game is to launch in (the fiscal fourth quarter), we believe that this news is positive in that more specific details are now released about the game," Wedbush Morgan Securities analyst Michael Pachter said in a note.

"We have modeled 3 million units in Take-Two's (fiscal 2004) for this game and believe that the Xbox version will be released in (fiscal 2005)," he said.

Atari Rides into the Wild West with Dead Man’s Hand

Epic Adventure Delivers Only Western-Themed First Person Shooter

The thrill of the Wild West has arrived on the Xbox video game system from Microsoft! Dead Man’s Hand, a western-themed first-person-shooter, has shipped to retail outlets nationwide, Atari, Inc. announced. The only first-person-shooter that turns gamers into cowboys, Dead Man’s Hand features dramatic saloon fights, horseback chases and exploding gun powder barrels. Developed by Human Head Studios, the creators of the Rune series, Dead Man’s Hand uses the Unreal technology from Epic Games to provide amazing graphics, non-stop action and enhanced multiplayer capabilities through Xbox Live. A PC version of the game will be released later this month.

"Dead Man’s Hand really capitalizes on the fun and folklore of the Old West with classic elements and storyline," said Nancy MacIntyre, vice president of marketing for Atari, Inc. "We are excited to bring this theme to the Xbox for the very first time."

In Dead Man’s Hand, players become El Tejon, a master gunslinger on a mission of vengeance after his gang, The Nine, betrays him. Once one of the most feared bandits in the west, El Tejon now comes seeking justice - and revenge.

Utilizing the power of the Unreal technology by Epic Games, Human Head has developed an amazing recreation of the American Frontier, ranging from sprawling vistas and rustic canyon towns to the mountains of the Pacific Northwest. The sophisticated in-game physics engine has hats flying off enemies, bad guys falling off roofs and bullets shattering windows and bottles.

A variety of competitive and cooperative play modes lets players compete against friends and other Xbox owners via Xbox Live. Western style options include classics like Deathmatch and Team Deathmatch and favorites with a new twist including Bounty and Posse multiplayer modes.

In the Old West, nothing helps fuel revenge like firearms and gambling. In Dead Man’s Hand, players have nine different authentic western-style pistols, shotguns and rifles to choose from as well as dynamite, whiskey bottles, Gatling guns and cannons to blow evil vermin into the afterlife. By shooting with accuracy and skill, players can build up their "Legend" score and unlock special trick shots for each weapon. Between showdowns, players can test their luck with the cards to win bonuses including health, ammo and additional "Legend" points.

Dead Man’s Hand for Xbox is rated ’T’ for Teen and is available at retail outlets nationwide for a suggested retail price of $29.99. The PC version will have a suggested retail price of $19.99 and will be available at the end of this month. Additional information about the game can be found at www.deadmanshandgame.com or at www.us.atari.com.

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A-ONE’s Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

New Netsky-D Worm Spreading Through E-Mail

A new computer worm dubbed "Netsky-D" was clogging e-mail systems around the world after emerging on Monday, a security expert said.

The worm is particularly difficult to root out because it lands in e-mail boxes using a number of different subject lines such as "re:details" or "re:here is the document."

"It arrives with an attached pif file (program information file) and it’s already extremely widespread," said Graham Cluley, senior technology consultant at Sophos Plc.

He said experts do not think the new virus is as big as MyDoom, which brought havoc to computer users and targeted Microsoft’s Web Site, but that the full extent of Netsky-D’s spread would be known as North America logs on.

When opened, the virus pif file will rapidly replicate itself, slowing down computers and e-mail bandwidth.

"We suspect people are more laid back about pif files because they may not have heard of them and may not realize they can contain dangerous code," Cluley said. "The best thing to do with this file is to delete it, don’t open it."

Netsky-B, an earlier variant of the latest worm, was rated the third worst computer virus in February after MyDoom-A and Sober-C, according to Sophos, which writes anti-virus and anti-spam software.

Virus Writers Wage Worm War

Antivirus experts have identified new versions of three major e-mail worms and say that a "war" between rival virus writers may be to blame for the rash of outbreaks in recent weeks.

New versions of the Mydoom, Netsky, and Bagle have all appeared on the Internet in the last 24 hours. Antivirus researchers have uncovered text messages in two of the worms that suggest a battle is underway between virus writers, antivirus companies say.

Examples of Netsky.F, Bagle.K,and Mydoom.H were isolated on Wednesday, according to antivirus company F-Secure.

All three variants resemble their predecessors, which spread in e-mail messages with vague-sounding subjects using infected attachments such as .zip, .exe, or .pif files. The viruses have their own SMTP engines and harvest e-mail addresses from infected computers, which are then targeted

with infected mail, antivirus companies say.

The Bagle and Mydoom worms also open communication ports on infected systems which can be used by remote attackers to route unsolicited commercial ("spam") e-mail, send malicious instructions to the computer, or install remote monitoring software, says Al Huger, senior director of engineering for security response at Symantec.

Bagle.J, Bagle.K, Netsky.F, and Mydoom.G also contain comments that are part of a spirited dialogue between virus authors, according to antivirus company Sophos.

Text comments in the worm code are preserved in the binary format file that is created when the code is "compiled," or turned into a computer program that can be run, Huger says.

Spiced with foul language and bad spelling, the messages portray a playground-style brawl between the authors, with the Internet worms acting as messengers.

"Hey, Netsky...don’t ruine (sp) our bussiness (sp), wanna start a war?" reads a message in the Bagle.J worm’s code, according to Sophos.

A message found in Netsky.F reads: "Skynet AntiVirus-- Bagle- you are a looser (sp)!!!!," and the recent Mydoom.G virus also includes hidden comments critical of the Netsky worm, F-Secure says.

The back and forth between virus authors started in January when Netsky began removing the Mydoom and Bagle viruses from machines it infected, Huger says.

The spat escalated in recent weeks, with multiple versions of the Bagle and Netsky worms appearing on an almost daily basis, primarily as vehicles for delivering new barbs and insults from the authors, Huger says.

Sparring matches between virus writers and hackers are nothing new, however the seriousness of the recent outbreaks has put this shouting match in the public eye, he says.

"This behavior isn’t new. The hacking community has been doing this for years," he says.

The exchanges have been amusing to weary antivirus researchers, who are also hopeful that they might lead to the capture of one or more of the worm authors.

"The more they talk, the more the open up chances to get caught," Huger says.

States Bent on Collecting Internet Taxes

Remember all those gifts you bought online during the holidays? Now it’s time to pay sales tax on them, at least so say the income tax forms of 20 states.

The latest to outstretch that revenue-seeking hand are New York and California, which this year added a line requiring taxpayers to declare any

tax they owe on out-of-state purchases.

Though state revenue agencies similarly sought sales tax on mail-order items before the e-commerce boom of the late 90s, Internet sales have "really shined a spotlight on it and increased the urgency," said Harley Duncan, executive director of the Federation of Tax Administrators.

By law, residents are supposed to pay sales taxes to their states if they order books, clothing, computers and other items by mail or online from businesses based elsewhere.

"Nobody - very few - ever followed that rule," said Anthony Leone, a certified public accountant in Buffalo.

The National Governors Association estimates state and local governments will lose at least $35 billion this year from Internet sales.

The new tax return line, New York state officials say, forces taxpayers to confront their liability or potentially face audits that could uncover credit card statements and mounting tax debt.

But it’s unclear whether that threat is enough.

Dan DeVeronica, 21, who owns an Internet cafe in Rochester, says most New Yorkers, including himself, will likely leave "line 56" blank "as sort of a protest."

Though Supreme Court precedents side with the states, DeVeronica said he was outraged New York would try to collect: "The Internet is not a government service. It’s privately owned so it shouldn’t be taxable."

It looks like scofflaws need worry little.

Officials from several states said they expect few, if any, tax returns to be audited - even if a taxpayer claims zero liability.

And so the revenues should keep trickling in.

New York tax officials are expecting the new tax line, for which they’ve added seven pages of instructions and tables, to yield just $2.5 million. Like New York, most states let taxpayers estimate their liability based on household income.

California projects its out-of-state sales line will bring in $13 million this year - out of an estimated $1.2 billion owed by individuals and businesses, said California Equalization Board spokesman Vic Anderson.

"That’s always a problem, making people aware of this liability," Anderson said. "It’s one of the most misunderstood taxes out there."

New York loses more than $1 billion in sales tax revenues from out-of-state purchases, according to a University of Tennessee study.

In Ohio, when the line was added to tax forms four years ago, 52,000 taxpayers participated. In 2002, the number dropped to 46,000, out of 5.7 million total returns, said Gary Gudmundson, a spokesman for the Ohio tax department. The state raises about $2 million, but projects that about $500 million goes uncollected.

States have tried other tactics, without any more success.

When Maine added the line in 1989, it also created a "default assessment" of 0.04 percent of adjusted gross income if the line was left blank. By 1998, the default was gone because of concerns the system wasn't fair for taxpayers who simply forgot or didn't know the rules, said Eileen Bemis, deputy director of the Maine Sales, Fuel and Special Tax Division.

Without the default, Maine generated $1.3 million from the line last year, but might be missing out on as much as $30 million a year, she said.

"It's pretty much an honor system in that it's very difficult to go back and audit someone's checkbook or credit card statements," Bemis said.

Already, a New York lawmaker has introduced a bill to drop the line.

"We're going to make tax evaders out of law-abiding citizens and policemen out of tax preparers and accountants," said Assemblyman Ronald Tocci, a Democrat in the chamber's majority. Who, he asked, "keeps tabs of what they buy on vacation in the Bahamas or Canada? Or anyplace? It's crazy. It's insane."

Forty-five states require buyers to pay sales taxes on Internet and other out-of-state purchases, though a few, including California and Minnesota, exempt the first few hundred dollars and focus on high-ticket items.

Meanwhile, a number of major retailers including Wal-Mart, Toys "R" Us and Target voluntarily collect state taxes. And some states are working on a "streamlined sales tax project" that would tax online purchases at the point of sale. Congress would have to enact a law, however, to make such a system nationwide.

States with sales tax lines on their tax forms include Alabama, California, Connecticut, Idaho, Indiana, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Utah, Vermont, Virginia and Wisconsin, according to the Federation of Tax Administrators.

Georgia, Hawaii and the District of Columbia have separate forms in their income tax packages.

SCO To Sling Lawsuit at User

No one can claim that the SCO Group does not follow through on its promises. The company is getting set to file a lawsuit against a Linux user Tuesday afternoon, according to spokesperson Blake Stowell. News of the impending suit became public on Monday during CEO Darryl McBride's speech at the Software 2004 conference in San Francisco.

The lawsuit - which centers on alleged violations of the SCO Group's intellectual property - was all but inevitable, given the hardened stances the two sides have taken in this saga. It began with SCO filing suit against IBM in March 2003, alleging that it misappropriated SCO's Unix source code and incorporated it into Linux. Later, SCO threatened to sue any Linux-using company that did not have a SCO license.

For the most part, the industry has been defiant against SCO's claims - downright ugly, in many instances. (Anonymous death threats against McBride

are the most notable example of out-of-control ire.)

Some companies, though, appear to be taking SCO seriously. On Monday, SCO announced that it had signed an intellectual-property licensing agreement with EV1Servers.Net, a dedicated hosting division of Houston-based Everyones Internet. It appears that Everyones Internet needed to assure its customers that there was not a SCO lawsuit hovering in the landscape, ready to disrupt operations.

"The SCO agreement eliminates uncertainty from our clients' hosting infrastructure," says Robert Marsh, head surfer and CEO of Everyones Internet. "Our current and future users now enjoy the peace of mind of knowing that their Web sites and data are hosted on a SCO IP-compliant platform."

It is unclear how many other firms have purchased a SCO IP license, which initially was offered to Fortune 1000 companies in August and made available to all companies this January.

"We haven't publicly disclosed the specific number, but I can say that a handful of Fortune 1000 companies have taken out a SCO IP license," Stowell told NewsFactor. "Also, a handful of small and medium-sized businesses have purchased the license as well," he noted.

SCO is pleased, thus far, with the level of acceptance the license has received, Stowell said. Of course, not all companies SCO has contacted have chosen to take out a license, he added, "which is why we have decided to file a lawsuit."

While SCO is not revealing too much of its legal strategy, it is obvious that it is going to use all of the options available to it, including suing potential customers. "SCO is being very aggressive about protecting what it perceives as its legal rights to the copyright," Yankee Group senior analyst Laura DiDio told NewsFactor.

It is a play borrowed directly from the RIAA, which has become notorious for the lawsuits filed against people who have been using peer-to-peer networks to download music illegally. Before filing the suits, the RIAA - like SCO - notified users and the public in general that it was going to file suit.

It is debatable whether that strategy is working for the RIAA. However, one thing is clear: Its legal tactics are not winning over any new friends. Not that being liked is SCO's main worry; indeed, the Utah-based firm probably stands as the most-hated organization in the tech industry these days, topping even Microsoft - which is no small feat.

Unlike the RIAA, though, the public perception of SCO is not as significant an issue as the potential payday it could win if it prevails. Then there is the matter of principle. Despite the anger SCO's move has engendered, it is clear that the company thinks it is in the right. The courts, of course, will determine whether that is so.

SCO Ordered To Reveal Infringing Code

SCO Group has been ordered to reveal in detail the code it claims IBM and Linux developers infringed. The judge in the case of SCO's US$5 billion

suit against IBM, Brooke Wells, wants both sides to lay their evidence on the table.

IBM also has been ordered to reveal its AIX and Dynix operating system code to SCO, something that Big Blue previously had offered to provide in the form of product versions. Both firms have until mid-April to comply with the court orders.

The infringing code probably will remain behind closed doors. "The Linux and the open source communities have been frustrated - saying that SCO had not shown its code," said Laura DiDio, Yankee Group analyst. "But it's probably going to be awhile before we see any of it," she told NewsFactor.

On one hand, the ruling is a relief, DiDio says, because it seems the case is moving along. But, overall, she sees it having little effect on the Linux wave. "There would have to be a major cataclysmic event for anything to derail Linux's momentum at this point," she noted.

The spirit of the ruling has given open-source advocates some wind in their sails because, they say, it pushes SCO one step closer in having to show their cards. For the open-source community - which embraces transparency as tantamount to integrity - nothing could be more damning than withholding evidence.

But in the business and legal arenas, such tactics are considered merely part of the game of competition. SCO is acting no differently than any other high-tech company.

Still, the firm has been on the losing side of a public-relations war. SCO contends it is attacking only those who infringe its intellectual property. The company paid about $100 million for the Unix product it believed it could market and grow. But SCO has been seen as trying to win in court what it cannot win in the marketplace.

It is one thing when Larry Ellison attacks Bill Gates. But unlike corporations, the open-source community is made up of programmers - many who work for companies - who often see their work a more than just a profit center. An attack on Linux, in some ways, is a personal attack.

The unfortunate piece is that the Unix family tree is a mess. With all the lawsuits over past versions of Unix and the quarrels over rights, SCO's suit against IBM has had the unintended effect of unearthing questions of SCO's own rights to Unix.

"It's gotten so tangled, I think the safest thing is to just wait and see," said DiDio. "But it's clear that no Linux user is going to rip out Linux until they see a court document," she added.

In a recent Forrester Research survey of firms using open-source software, only 9 percent said they were worried about being sued. The biggest concern, registered by 56 percent, was about support.

"Our advice to end-users is to use whatever resources are available - the HP indemnification, the OSDL or Red Hat defense funds - to delay paying SCO money," said Forrester analyst Ted Schadler. He believes the court order to reveal infringing code is a significant step toward recoding Linux. "The Linux community will make this problem go away very quickly," he told NewsFactor.

To some open-source programmers, the order requiring SCO to reveal its

code - even behind closed doors - represents progress. Software expert Bruce Perens calls it the beginning of the end for SCO's legal attack. "I think what they will find is that SCO had little evidence all along," he told NewsFactor. "But I don't think the judge will throw the case out of court."

Legal observers say Judge Wells essentially gave SCO the benefit of the doubt, because the company did not produce such evidence from an earlier December order. The slam-dunk that many open-source advocates so often predict most likely will not happen.

SCO actually could win the case against IBM, but legal observers say they probably will not get the payday that CEO Darl McBride envisions. And - unless a cataclysm occurs - the growth of Linux will not miss a beat, regardless of what happens in SCO vs. IBM.

Senators Try to Smoke Out Spyware

Three U.S. senators are tackling the growing problem of "spyware," software programs that track what people do online, alter their Web browser settings and turn their computers into unwitting Internet advertising generators.

The "SPYBLOCK" Act, which was introduced late last week, would make it illegal to use the Internet to install software on people's computers without their consent, and require companies that offer software downloads to provide more disclosure about what the programs do and what information they collect. The bill also would require Internet ads generated by the software to be clearly labeled.

The bill would allow states to sue violators in federal court and would call on the Federal Trade Commission to impose fines and civil penalties under consumer protection laws.

"Computer users should have the security of knowing their privacy isn't being violated by software parasites that have secretly burrowed into their hard drive," said Sen. Ron Wyden (D-Ore.), who introduced the bill along with Sens. Conrad Burns (R-Mont.) and Barbara Boxer (D-Calif.). The bill is similar to legislation offered last year by Rep. Mary Bono (R-Calif.).

Computer users often wind up with spyware on their PCs after downloading "free" software such as programs that let them share digital music files. It often piggybacks on free versions of media players, download managers or online greeting cards.

Non-invasive versions of those programs are sometimes are called "adware." Companies that use it usually say so and allow users to disable the ads by paying a small fee to license the full version of the product. Still, the lawmakers said many companies that bundle adware with other software do not explain clearly enough how marketers will use the information those programs collect.

More aggressive forms of adware and spyware can install themselves through so-called "drive-by downloads," where consumers unknowingly download invasive programs by browsing a particular Web site. Much like a computer virus, spyware can be difficult for a non-technologically savvy user to remove and it frequently saps the victim's computer processing power and Internet connection speeds.

Spyware has existed for years - the first legislation that took a shot at it came from Democratic presidential hopeful Sen. John Edwards (D-N.C.) four years ago - but the problem is becoming more widespread, prompting fresh annoyance from Internet users and calls to bring it to a halt.

"The major concern here is user control and transparency," said Ari Schwartz, associate director at the Washington, D.C.-based Center for Democracy and Technology. "We've found that many consumers do not understand what they're getting themselves into when they download software."

The bill probably will not cut down on the worst kinds of spyware - programs that exploit computer security flaws to hijack Internet connections or install "dialer programs" that force the computer to call expensive online 1-900 adult services - said Stewart Baker, an attorney at Washington law firm Steptoe & Johnson.

In that sense, Baker said, it is a lot like the CAN-SPAM Act, which many computer experts said has done little to combat the skyrocketing problem of unsolicited bulk e-mail since it became law in January.

"If you apply the mailbox test, the spam law hasn't had a significant effect. It would be nice to see the spam law working as intended before we say we want to follow the same route with spyware," said Baker, who advises Internet service providers on complying with the new spam law.

Several of the nation's largest Internet service providers, including America Online and Earthlink, provide free software for their subscribers to scan their computers for spyware threats.

There are other anti-spyware programs available for downloading, but CDT's Schwartz warned that some unscrupulous marketers are selling programs that claim to get rid of spyware but surreptitiously install it.

Last fall, the FTC accused a tiny company called D Squared Solutions of extorting computer users by inundating them with pop-up ads to promote software that purportedly blocked the exact kinds of ads it was sending.

The FTC said D Squared bombarded computers with ads funneled through a security hole in a seldom-used program that runs by default on all recent Microsoft Windows PCs. Microsoft has since issued a patch to close the security hole and has said it will turn off the program via its next major software update later this year. That case is slated to go to trial next month.

The commission is scheduled to hold a public workshop on spyware, adware and other software on April 19, 2004.

Supreme Court Hears Online Porn Case

Kids, don't try this at home. The Bush administration's top Supreme Court lawyer says he typed the words "free porn" into an Internet search engine on his home computer and got a list of more than 6 million Web sites. That's proof, Solicitor General Theodore Olson told the Supreme Court on Tuesday, of the need for a law protecting children from a tide of online smut.

Internet porn is "persistent and unavoidable," Olson told the court, and government has a strong interest in shielding teenagers and younger children from it.

The problem, as the Supreme Court has observed before, is that a lot of dirty pictures are constitutionally protected free speech that adults have the right to see and buy. Children don't have the same rights, but kids and adults alike can surf the Web.

Porn is "as easily available to children as a television remote," Olson told the justices as he defended a 1998 law that Congress meant as a firewall to shield children.

The Child Online Protection Act has never taken effect. A federal appeals court struck down the law twice, on separate constitutional grounds, and it is now before the Supreme Court for a second time.

The law, known as COPA, was a replacement for a broader law that the Supreme Court rejected as unconstitutional in 1997. Congress retooled the law to address the high court's free speech concerns, Olson said.

Several justices weren't buying it.

"It seems to me this is very sweeping," Justice Anthony M. Kennedy said at one point.

If porn sellers are flouting the existing laws about obscenity, perhaps the government should go after them more aggressively, Justice Sandra Day O'Connor suggested.

The Bush administration has brought 21 indictments in two years alleging that Web site operators and others crossed the line from acceptable smut to illegal obscenity, Olson told the court.

"With such a vast array of sites, there are so few prosecutions," O'Connor said. "It's just amazing."

COPA would make it a crime for commercial Web site operators to knowingly place material that is harmful to children within their unrestricted online reach. Violators can face six months in jail and civil and criminal penalties of $50,000.

The law is meant to go after the really bad guys, Olson argued. He suggested that the American Civil Liberties Union and other opponents of the law are crying wolf.

It's the government that is being unrealistic, ACLU lawyer Ann Beeson countered.

The law "criminalizes a depiction or description of nudity, or even a description of the female breast," Beeson told the justices.

The ACLU challenged the law on behalf of online bookstores, artists and others, including operators of Web sites that offer explicit how-to sex advice or health information. Among them is Mitch Tepper, whose Web site dispenses very specific instructions to help the disabled enjoy sex. One article he has posted online is titled "Handsfree Whoopie."

Tepper risks jail time if some prosecutor somewhere finds his material

"harmful to minors," the ACLU argued. COPA gives no absolute definition of what is "harmful to minors," leaving that in part to "the average person, applying contemporary community standards."

The ACLU maintains that the community standards test is meaningless when applied to the far-flung Internet, but the Supreme Court ruled two years ago that that claim is not enough, on its own, to make the law unconstitutional.

The high court is expected to issue a more definitive ruling by summer.

The case is Ashcroft v. ACLU, 03-218.

Sweden Adopts EU Ban on Spam

Sweden has belatedly adopted a European Union ban on unsolicited e-mail, a Parliament official said Thursday.

Lawmakers approved the ban Wednesday after the EU issued a warning to Sweden and eight other countries that had not adopted the law last year, said Anders Norin, a parliamentary committee member.

The legislation aims to reduce Internet fraud and protect legitimate businesses by banning companies from sending unsolicited e-mail, or spam, plucking personal data from Web sites or pinpointing the locations of satellite-linked mobile phone users.

The law stops short of describing how nations can purge and punish spam senders, who easily cloak their identities on the Internet.

It was passed by 253 votes to 49 in the 349-seat Riksdag, or parliament. Forty-seven lawmakers were absent.

The law will take effect on April 1.

Spam Tide May Be Turning

Major announcements at the RSA Conference here last week-in addition to recent anti-spam technology advances-mark the beginning of the end of spam as we know it.

At the conference, Microsoft Corp. introduced its CSRI (Coordinated Spam Reduction Initiative), and Sendmail Inc. announced broad support of SMTP identification schemes.

Other anti-spam initiatives have moved ahead in recent weeks. The SPF (Sender Policy Framework), championed by Meng Weng Wong, gained traction on the news that it will be formally submitted to the Internet Engineering Task Force. Yahoo Inc.’s Domain Keys, announced in December, has also bolstered the campaign for e-mail identity technology. Brightmail Inc.’s Reputation Service and IronPort Systems Inc.’s SMTPi initiative debuted late last month as well.

The premise of these new tools and initiatives is that once identity is

effectively tied to e-mail messages, mail-handling systems will be able to forward legitimate e-mail and trash the forged junk now flooding the Internet.

eWEEK Labs therefore recommends that IT managers focus their energy on implementing new technology in their e-mail systems, instead of evaluating content-filtering anti-spam tools.

Because CSRI, SPF and other anti-spoofing technologies are still in the early stages of deployment, content-based anti-spam tools aren't dead yet, of course. However, we believe IT managers should shift focus to participating in the pilot programs of e-mail identification systems and spend less time looking at the current crop of content-filtering tools.

According to George Webb, group business manager at Microsoft, the first step in the CSRI framework, Caller ID, enables domain owners to assert their identity by adding records to their Domain Name System that allow recipients to verify the address of servers authorized to send e-mail.

"This is a technical proposal that, if adopted broadly across the e-mail infrastructure, would provide a great tool in fighting domain spoofing," Webb said in a telephone interview last week.

The rest of CSRI boils down to a murkier set of mechanisms for senders to prove they are not spammers by using one of two methods. (The CSRI framework is at www.microsoft.com/mscorp/twc/privacy/spam.mspx.)

Large-volume senders will have to show they conform to rules and guidelines such as those contained in the federal CAN-SPAM legislation that became effective Jan. 1.

Senders can also buy their way into Bonded Sender, an IronPort program that is administered by TRUSTe. In an interview with eWEEK Labs, Tom Gillis, senior vice president of marketing at IronPort, explained IronPort's Bonded Sender program, in which users post a bond that is debited $10 every time a recipient complains of receiving spam. To date, no money has been paid out from Bonded Sender, Gillis said.

Individuals and small companies that can't afford to join programs like Bonded Sender could face Microsoft's CSRI in the form of the Black Penny program. Black Penny is an anti-spam proposal that would require e-mail programs to process a difficult computational puzzle before e-mail could be sent. In effect, this would force the sender to burn CPU cycles that add cost to e-mail message generation.

These anti-spam proposals will go before the IETF and other standards bodies for ratification-but probably not until the specifications have become de facto industry norms. Now is the time for IT managers to get involved in the process.

It is likely that the technology choices made in the next year will set the direction of anti-spam efforts until (and if) SMTP can be completely ripped out and replaced with a reliable mail transport system.

Paying for E-Mail May Be Anti-Spam Tactic

If the U.S. Postal Service delivered mail for free, our mailboxes would

surely runneth over with more credit card offers, sweepstakes entries and supermarket fliers. That’s why we get so much junk e-mail: It’s essentially free to send. So Microsoft Corp. chairman Bill Gates, among others, is now suggesting that we start buying "stamps" for e-mail.

Many Internet analysts worry, though, that turning e-mail into an economic commodity would undermine its value in democratizing communication.

But let’s start with the math: At perhaps a penny or less per item, e-mail postage wouldn’t significantly dent the pocketbooks of people who send only a few messages a day. Not so for spammers who mail millions at a time.

Though postage proposals have been in limited discussion for years - a team at Microsoft Research has been at it since 2001 - Gates gave the idea a lift in January at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland.

Details came last week as part of Microsoft’s anti-spam strategy. Instead of paying a penny, the sender would "buy" postage by devoting maybe 10 seconds of computing time to solving a math puzzle. The exercise would merely serve as proof of the sender’s good faith.

Time is money, and spammers would presumably have to buy many more machines to solve enough puzzles.

The open-source software Hashcash, available since about 1997, takes a similar approach and has been incorporated into other spam-fighting tools including Camram and Spam Assassin.

Meanwhile, Goodmail Systems Inc. has been in touch with Yahoo! Inc. and other e-mail providers about using cash. Goodmail envisions charging bulk mailers a penny a message to bypass spam filters and avoid being incorrectly tossed as junk.

That all sounds good for curbing spam, but what if it kills the e-mail you want as well?

Consider how simple and inexpensive it is today to e-mail a friend, relative or even a city-hall bureaucrat. It’s nice not to have to calculate whether greeting grandma is worth a cent.

And what of the communities now tied together through e-mail - hundreds of cancer survivors sharing tips on coping; dozens of parents coordinating soccer schedules? Those pennies add up.

"It detracts from your ability to speak and to state your opinions to large groups of people," said David Farber, a veteran technologist who runs a mailing list with more than 20,000 subscribers. "It changes the whole complexion of the Net."

Goodmail chief executive Richard Gingras said individuals might get to send a limited number for free, while mailing lists and nonprofit organizations might get price breaks.

But at what threshold would e-mail cease to be free? At what point might a mailing list be big or commercial enough to pay full rates? Goodmail has no price list yet, so Gingras couldn’t say.

Vint Cerf, one of the Internet’s founding fathers, said spammers are bound to exploit any free allotments.

"The spammers will probably just keep changing their mailbox names," Cerf said. "I continue to be impressed by the agility of spammers."

And who gets the payments? How do you build - and pay for - a system to track all this? How do you keep such a system from becoming a target for hacking and scams?

The proposals are also largely U.S.-centric, and even with seamless currency conversion, paying even a token amount would be burdensome for the developing world, said John Patrick, former vice president of Internet technology at IBM Corp.

"We have to think of not only, let's say, the relatively well-off half billion people using e-mail today, but the 5 or 6 billion who aren't using it yet but who soon will be," Patrick said.

Some proposals even allow recipients to set their own rates. A college student might accept e-mail with a one-cent stamp; a busy chief executive might demand a dollar.

"In the regular marketplace, when you have something so fast and efficient that everyone wants it, the price goes up," said Sonia Arrison of the Pacific Research Institute, a think tank that favors market-based approaches.

To think the Internet can shatter class distinctions that exist offline is "living in Fantasyland," Arrison said.

Nonetheless, it'll be tough to persuade people to pay - in cash or computing time that delays mail - for something they are used to getting for free.

Critics of postage see more promise in other approaches, including technology to better verify e-mail senders and lawsuits to drive the big spammers out of business.

"Back in the early '90s, there were e-mail systems that charged you 10 cents a message," said John Levine, an anti-spam advocate. "And they are all dead."

Earthlink to Test Caller ID for E-Mail

ISP Earthlink will soon begin testing new e-mail security technology, including Microsoft's recently released Caller ID technology, a company executive says.

Earthlink will be experimenting "very soon," with "sender authentication" technology including Caller ID and a similar plan called Sender Policy Framework (SPF). The Atlanta-based ISP will be evaluating other e-mail security proposals as well, but is not backing any specific technology, says Robert Sanders, chief architect at Earthlink.

Plans to secure e-mail by verifying the source of e-mail messages have garnered much attention in recent months, as the volume of spam has swelled and the number of Internet scams has increased.

Spammers and Internet-based criminals often fake, or "spoof," the origin of

e-mail messages to trick recipients into opening them and trusting their content. Sender authentication technologies attempt to stop spoofing by matching the source of e-mail messages with a specific user or an approved e-mail server for the Internet domain that the message purports to come from.

So far, Earthlink has stayed out of the sender authentication fray while Web-based e-mail services, including Yahoo and Hotmail, and major ISP America Online, have all backed slightly different sender authentication proposals.

Yahoo is promoting an internally developed technology called DomainKeys, that uses public key cryptography to "sign" e-mail messages.

AOL said in January that it is testing SPF for outgoing mail, publishing the IP (Internet protocol) addresses of its e-mail servers in an SPF record in the DNS (Domain Name System).

Finally, Microsoft-owned Hotmail is publishing the addresses of its e-mail servers using that company’s recently announced Caller ID standard.

Earthlink believes that sender authentication is necessary, and is prepared to support multiple sender authentication standards if necessary. However, the company hopes that one clear winner emerges from the field of competing proposals, Sanders says.

"I don’t think it’s unlikely that we’ll see two or three coexisting proposals go into production. We had hopes that they would be able to merge, but I think at this point each standard adds a different function, and we’re unlikely to see a merger," he says.

For now, Caller ID and SPF will probably make it into production first, because neither require companies to deploy new software to participate in the sender authentication system, he says.

Earthlink is also interested in proposals like Yahoo’s DomainKeys, which allows e-mail authors to cryptographically sign messages, enabling recipients to verify both the content of a message and its author. However, DomainKeys is more complicated to deploy than either Caller ID or SPF and requires software changes that will slow implementation, he says.

Earthlink is not backing any proposal but is interested in looking at the results of its trial deployments, and those of other organizations.

"We have to get real world data from people who have deployed SPF or Caller ID," he says.

The company is also a member of the Anti-Spam Technical Alliance, an industry group that includes Microsoft, AOL, Yahoo, Comcast, and British Telecommunications, and continues to participate in meetings and initiatives through that organization, he says.

Microsoft’s backing of Caller ID and its plans to use that technology for Hotmail tips the scales in favor of that technology, he says.

"One factor that determines what you, as an e-mail sender, deploy is the important question of ’Who am I sending mail to?’ What the larger [e-mail] receivers deploy is what you’re going to support," he says.

Blogging Still Infrequent

Despite the potential of turning every Internet user into a publisher, relatively few have created Web journals called blogs and even fewer do so with regularity, a new study finds.

Some bloggers indeed update their journals often, in some cases several times a day. But it's clearly a minority who are taking advantage of the blog and its potential to steer the online discourse with personal musings about news events and daily life.

The Pew Internet and American Life Project, in a study released Sunday, found that somewhere between 2 percent and 7 percent of adult Internet users in the United States actually keep their own blogs.

Of those, only about 10 percent update them daily, the majority doing so only once a week or less often.

"The impression out there is that a lot of the blog activity is very feverish," said Lee Rainie, the Pew project's director. "That's not the case. For most bloggers, it's not an all-consuming, all-the-time kind of experience."

The study was largely based on random telephone surveys of 1,555 Internet users taken from March 12 to May 20, 2003. The margin of sampling error is plus or minus 3 percentage points.

That survey found only 2 percent of users keeping blogs, although a preliminary analysis of follow-up surveys from early 2004 showed the figure increasing to about 7 percent.

About 11 percent of Internet users report visiting blogs written by others. Most often, they were for blogs written by friends. But blog readers are more likely to go to journals kept by strangers rather than by family members.

Among other findings: 21 percent of Internet users have posted photos on Web sites, and 20 percent say they have allowed others to download video or music files from their computers. Seven percent have webcams that let others see live pictures of them over the Net.

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